



Interdisciplinary Learning

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Expanding Our Practices to Improve Our Communities

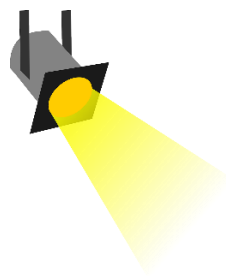
The Interdisciplinary Instruction Team

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/II>



Our students are

Engaged
Supported
Challenged
Prepared



By:

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Interdisciplinary
Instruction Team
Coordinator

OK... I'm ready to host an Interdisciplinary/PBL-focused classroom. Who's with me?

In her most recent article [*Future-Proofing Students*](#), Michele Borba outlines seven strengths and twenty-one abilities for future readiness and asserts that “the world is changing and so must our instructional practices. Our moral obligation is to equip this generation with the content and abilities they will need to handle an unpredictable future and thrive. Doing so may be our most important educational task.” I believe that any of us would be hard pressed to argue that Borba is flat-out wrong in her assertion. We’ve been experiencing systemic issues for years in our own classrooms – dwindling student engagement, attendance/truancy issues, increasing behavioral disruptions, and the list goes on and on... So how can we start to have those “tough conversations” with those who may be, let’s say, skeptics to change...? Here are some [IDEAS](#) from ASCD that might help!

I – Engage in Inquiry as a staff. *Inquiry is an investigative process that seeks out understandings and explanations – of observations, outcomes, concepts, and events. The process is driven by thoughtful questions that can be researched and explored in different ways. Promoting inquiry in your own work as a staff to explore that which is best for your students’ learning can yield some amazing results.*

D – Adopt a Design-Thinking mentality. *Design is an iterative process that results in the development of a new product or process for addressing a need, solving a problem, or improving an existing product/process. It includes clarifying a problem/need, generating possible solutions, testing/evaluating solution options, and developing a plan for implementation. If expecting our students to engage in this process is important enough to focus on in our classrooms, why shouldn’t it drive our own decision-making?*

E – Evaluate results. *Evaluation involves selecting and applying appropriate criteria for assessing the quality, significance, or merit of something. Evaluation can be used to judge things like products, outcomes, and processes. Taking time to evaluate results of inquiry and design-thinking actions will best prepare all stakeholders to take concrete actions for improvement of the student experience.*

A – Argumentation is good. *Argumentation is a reasoning process for debating and supporting an idea or position. It involves making a claim and justifying it with reasons and evidence. It can also involve critiquing an argument by challenging its claim of the reasons or evidence given to support it. Debating approaches to including interdisciplinary and PBL is healthy, and no one should shy away from it!*

S – Analyze the Systems. *Systems analysis is a process for understanding a system’s elements and how they interact. It includes analyzing the various elements in a system and predicting how changes to any part(s) of the system can have both short- and long-term consequences. Whether it is a proposed NEW system of interdisciplinary/PBL, or simply a “retrofit” of an existing system, taking time to analyze is important and necessary.*



What's UP: Timely Information

The Interdisciplinary Instruction Team continues to provide support for making the transition to II and project-based learning. Go to the [home page](#) and watch a video that explains II and project-based learning, then follow the links on the bottom of the page to learn more about [what II/PJB learning](#) is, [why](#) it is important and [how](#) we might approach this work.

Visit our newly published page, [Interdisciplinary Instruction Professional Learning](#), to see the various opportunities to engage with the Interdisciplinary Instruction Team!

- Join us during our Weekly Office Hours
- Engage in asynchronous/independent professional learning modules
- Consider attending upcoming live (in-person or virtual) events

Please know that while some opportunities are currently available, others still remain under construction at this time!



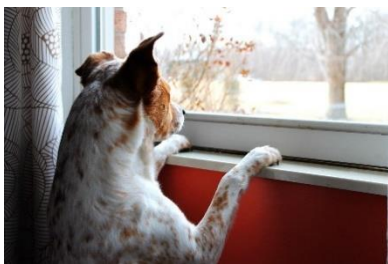
Resources: professional texts, websites, podcasts, etc.

Here are some articles that contain current research on helping your colleagues consider/reconsider how to explore interdisciplinary/PBL in your schools:

- [Future-Proofing Students](#) by Michele Borba
- [How to Transform High School? Let Academics and Career Skills Join Forces](#) by Gene Bottoms
- [5 Ideas for Developing Real-World Thinking Skills](#) by Harvey F. Silver, Abigail L. Boutz, and Jay McTighe

And don't forget... your Interdisciplinary Instruction Team at the Department is poised to engage in conversations with you and colleagues on how to embrace interdisciplinary/PBL instruction in your unique schools/districts.

Reach out to us to schedule those important conversations!



The Last Word

As educators, we know that establishing a personal rapport with students creates optimal conditions in which learning can occur. May is Mental Health Awareness month and the pre-pandemic trends of increased mental health issues in young people was exacerbated by the past two years. In the next issue we will explore some practices that help us support and engage students in both virtual and in-person settings, improve learning and take care of ourselves in the process.